felt that no public purpose would be serve by maintaining MSTC under the Government. The Commission recommended disinvestment of 100% Government of India's holding in MSTC. The Commission further recommended that in the event of no investors being interested in the company, there would be no option but to close down the operations of MSTC. Since there was no response to the public advertisement issued in July, 2003 inviting Expressions of Interest from the prospective investors, the process of disinvestment through strategic sale is not being pursued at present.

(c) and (d) Yes, Sir. The net profits earned by MSTC was Rs. 3.53 crore, Rs. 3,80 crore and Rs. 4.54 crore in the years 1999-2000,2000-01 and 2001-02 respectively.

(e) The declared disinvestment policy of the Government is that the Government, in generality of cases, will reduce its equity to 26% or below in Central Public Sector Undertakings operating in non-strategic areas. This policy is applicable to all Central Public Sector Undertakings, whether profit making or not. MSTC is operating in a non-strategic area.

Sale of Numaligarh Refinery

1763. SHRI DRUPAD BORGOHAIN: Will the Minister of DISINVESTMENT be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to sell shares of Numaligarh Refinery to Oil India Ltd; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF DISINVESTMENT (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) and (b) The Government is considering a proposal to raise the equity of Oil India Limited (OIL) in Numaligarh Refinery Limited from 12.35% to 26% by transferring to OIL 12.34% shares held by Oil Industry Development board (OIDB) and 1.31% held by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL).

Visit of Pakistanis to J&K

1764. DR. ABRAR AHMED: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir has urged Government to allow selected groups of Pakistani nationals to visit the State as a counter to Pakistan's propaganda of human rights violations in Kashmir; and

(b) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) According to available information, Chief Minister of the State of Jammu and Kashmir had reportedly made a statement in which it was suggested, *inter alia,* that people from Pakistan be encouraged to visit the State.

It has been the policy of the Government of India to promote people to people contacts between India and Pakistan. Foreigners, including Pakistani nationals, have been visiting the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Palestinian Foreign Minister's Visit to India

1765. SHRI K. CHANDRAN PILLAI: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFA4RS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Palestinian Foreign Minister visited India prior to the visit of Ariel Sharon;

(b) whether any joint public statement by the Palestinian Minister and the concerned Indian authority was issued during his visit;

(c) if so, the details thereof; and

(d) if not, the reasons therefore?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Dr. Nabil Sha'ath, Foreign Minister of Palestine, paid an official visit to India on August 27-September 1, 2003.

(b) to (d) No Joint Statement was issued. In a Press Release issued on the eve of his visit, it was stated that Dr. Nabil Sha'ath's visit was in response to an invitation of our External Affairs Minister. It was also stated that India has consistently supported the Palestinian cause. This longstanding position has roots in India's traditional ties with the Arab